

Administration of Donald J. Trump, 2018

Remarks on Signing the Know the Lowest Price Act and the Patient Right To Know Drug Price Act and an Exchange With Reporters

October 10, 2018

Hurricane Michael

The President. Well, thank you very much, everybody. This is a very important day for our country in a lot of ways. But before we begin, we have another important subject. I want to give an update on the really devastating storm bearing down on Florida. It's moving rapidly, and it's at a very high level. Some are saying it's one of the biggest storms ever to hit our country.

It built very rapidly, very quickly. And I've just concluded a briefing with the Secretary of Homeland Security and the Administrator of FEMA, and we are watching Hurricane Michael. It's just hitting shore now. Winds are going up to close to 200 miles an hour. You don't hear about that. Category 4, you don't hear about that.

This is the most powerful recorded storm to strike the Florida Panhandle ever, and it will bring with it anywhere from 150-mile to almost 200-mile-an-hour winds. The storm surges could be up to 15 feet. Additional rainfall could also produce flash flooding at the highest levels.

We've been in constant communications with Governor Rick Scott of Florida and with all of the authorities in the various States. We're very well prepared for it. Massive amounts of food, and we have first responders all over. The electrical companies are staged and ready to go in immediately after the storm leaves. Thousands of people, hundreds of trucks—actually, over a thousand trucks. So we have large amounts of food and water and everything else that you need. And that will go—immediately be rushed in as the storm leaves.

Federal resources are on the ground at every level. And so we are absolutely ready. It's a top priority, and the single top priority is the saving of life. We have moved a lot of people off the area and out of the path of the storm, but people remain; some people just don't want to go. And we have no choice but to let them stay.

It's going to be a big one. The winds are going to be so tremendous. This will be a lot of water, but this will be tremendous wind. And a lot of those houses aren't built for winds like that. We haven't seen winds like that.

Florida and Georgia will bear the brunt of the storm. However, Hurricane Michael, as it's called, is expected to bring very, very considerable rainfall to North and South Carolina, in addition. And I just left there, and they are—they had a tremendous storm, as you know—Florence. And that was a heavy water storm. More so than the wind, it was the water. And now, unfortunately, North and South Carolina are going to be getting some additional water as it dries out, and here comes some more water.

So it's a tough situation. But we're with them. We're with Georgia. We're with Florida. We're with Alabama. Everybody that's going to be hit, we have covered. And I just say God bless everyone, because it's going to be a rough one. It's going to be a very dangerous one. My administration will continue to provide updates and information as it becomes available.

Prescription Drug Costs

We are here today on a very different subject, and that's the issue of, really, to me, vital importance. It's been from day one of the administration; it's the well-being of every American—the price of prescription drugs. It's way out of whack. It's way too high. I've been talking about it for a long time, long before I ever decided to run for President.

You look at prices in our country, and for the exact same drug, in other countries, it's much lower. Exact same—made in the same plant by the same company. And I said, "What's going on?" We have middleman problems. We have a lot of other problems. Well, we're ending many of those problems today. And we're going to end them.

Based on what we're signing today—two bills—we'll be able to do additional things, Mr. Secretary, over the coming, actually, months—as opposed to years. And we're going to see drug prices not only not go up, but come down.

So today I am thrilled to sign two bills that will lower the cost of prescription drugs. It's the Know the Lowest Price Act of 2018 and the Patient Right To Know Drug Prices Act. And obviously, based on the name, you can tell that this gives people knowledge as to prices at different locations, where to buy the drugs. That will have an immediate impact too.

It's called the law of supply of demand. Pretty simple. But we didn't have that. They didn't want to have that. A lot of people didn't want to have that. But now we have it, and it's going to really drive prices.

Earlier this year, I released our drug pricing blueprint, setting out a new agenda to drive down the drug prices for all Americans. Within a week of announcing the blueprint, my administration began to crack down on so-called "gag clauses" in Medicare Part D plans. You all know what that is. These clauses prevent pharmacists from telling patients about more affordable options for prescription drugs.

Today Congress is building on my administration's actions with legislation—very strong legislation—to completely end these unjust gag clauses once and for all. Our great citizens deserve to know the lowest price available at our pharmacies, and now that is what they will be getting. They'll be able to see pricing. They'll be able to see where they should go. And as they start leaving certain pharmacies, those pharmacies will be dropping their prices.

I'd like to thank Senator Susan Collins for her incredible leadership on this legislation. And I haven't seen you in a few days. [*Laughter*] I want to also thank you for some of the most beautiful words. It was incredible. Admired by everybody. Thank you, Susan. Really amazing. Thank you very much.

And I would also like to recognize Senator Lamar Alexander, my friend; Senator Bill Cassidy, my friend; Senator Debbie Stabenow, who I don't know, but someday, she'll be a friend. [*Laughter*] And somebody that's really worked hard—I've heard this for a long time—Representative Buddy Carter. Really worked—thank you, Buddy.

Also, of course, I'd like to thank Secretary of Health and Human Services Alex Azar. Extraordinary person. And he knows the industry better than anybody, because he was very successful in the industry.

Only 100 days after releasing my drug pricing blueprint, 15 drug companies reduced their list prices, rolled back price increases, or froze their prices for the rest of the year. And I think you probably remember a month ago when I called—at the request of Alex Azar, I called Pfizer, Novartis, a couple of others. And they had announced drug price increases, fairly substantial. And I said: "Can't do that. Can't do that. We're going down. We're not going up."

And that's probably when I first realized the power of Presidency, because they all ended that increase. [*Laughter*] You saw that, Bill. You've never seen that one before. But they all said, "Sir, we're not going to increase." And they put out notices that the increase will not take effect. And I said, "Boy, this is a powerful position." [*Laughter*] But it was really at the behest of the Secretary. And we've kept them down, but we're now going to watch them go actually down.

We've increased competition and reduced regulations to deliver medicine to patients faster and cheaper. We've massively sped up the FDA approval process. Last year, the FDA approved more than 1,000 low-cost generics—the most in its history; never done anything like that—saving America almost \$9 billion in the first year of my administration. It's a very important thing for us. And I can tell you, this has been a priority from day one.

We took action to stop hospitals from overcharging seniors on Medicare, which will save them hundreds of millions of dollars on drug payments in this year alone. We've given Medicare Part D plans new tools to negotiate lower prices for more drugs. Thanks to our actions to increase competition and drive down costs, average Medicare Part D premiums will start to substantially decline for the second year in a row. We've already gotten it down a lot, but now it's going to go down with what we're doing today and what we've done over the last couple of months.

Further, I've directed my administration to confront the global freeloading of U.S. taxpayers. Foreign countries extort lower prices from U.S. drug makers for their citizens, subsidized by higher cost prices for American citizens. All research and development and everything is borne by our country, and other countries are not asked to, you know, pick up their fair share. It's called "welcome to the game." Because on—whether it's trade or military or so many other things, they do the same thing. But it will all stop.

We're also taking dramatic action to make health insurance more affordable. We're allowing Americans to pool their resources to buy better health care for less money through association health plans. And that's really taken off. And they're getting tremendous deals, actually, even lower than we thought. It's a beautiful thing to see.

And we've expanded access to short-term plans to provide coverage options at just a fraction of the cost of Obamacare. Much less money. For example, according to eHealth, the average lowest premium for an Obamacare plan for a 40-year old woman is about \$4,200 per year. By contrast, the average lowest premium for short-term coverage for this individual is \$1,300 a year, a savings of \$3,000. And I would say most people would say it would be better. So it's much less money, and it's better. And people are signing up very rapidly, as we see.

We've also ended the unfair individual mandate penalty, which punished Americans because they didn't want to pay a fortune for the Obamacare disaster. It was one of the worst things. People are paying a lot of money for the privilege of not paying a lot of money for bad health care. And we've ended it. It was the most unpopular thing within Obamacare.

And thanks to our actions today—all of us, every one of us here—for the first time since Obamacare went into effect, average premiums on the exchanges are coming down. Through good management and lots of other things, we're keeping the premiums down.

We're strongly protecting Americans with preexisting conditions. That's a very important thing to Republicans: preexisting conditions. We are protecting Americans with preexisting conditions.

In less than 2 years, we have taken unprecedented action to make health care more affordable and to give patients more choice and more control. The American people deserve a health care system that works for them, not one that takes advantage of them, and that's what been happening. But we're changing that rapidly.

Along with a very Republican Congress, I am delivering on my promise to lower drug prices. And I really do believe Democrats want to do that too, very much. I've spoken to many of them, and they want to see that happen too. Debbie, I can tell you: They want to see it happen. Okay? I can't put you in a position where you want—you want them to go down too.

Senator Deborah A. Stabenow. Of course, of course.

The President. We all do. If there's anything bipartisan, it's lowering drug prices.

Lower premiums: We're making health care really affordable and making it great. And it's affecting all Americans. So tremendous progress has been made. But where we're making very obvious progress, and you can see it, is we are reducing prescription drugs and the cost of prescription drugs.

So I want to thank all of the folks behind me and aside me. We have the great Larry Kudlow, whose voice is so beautiful. For so many years, I've listened. And now he's working with us. [*Laughter*] And every time I hear those beautiful words—and they have been beautiful.

The economy, Larry, how is it doing?

National Economic Council Director Lawrence A. Kudlow. Couldn't be better.

The President. Good. Good. [*Laughter*] Good. It is doing well. Thank you. I'm going to sign this now. Thank you.

I'd like to ask the Secretary just to say a few words on the actual pricing itself. Okay? Thank you.

Secretary of Health and Human Services Alex M. Azar II. Well, that you very much, Mr. President. And I just want to echo the President's gratitude to the Members of Congress and the Senate for passing these two very important pieces of legislation that end pharmacy gag practices.

You know, what that's about is preventing a patient from knowing they could pay less for drugs. And now we're giving patients the right to know. You can ask your pharmacist, "Could I pay less for this medicine than what my insurance is going to make me pay?" And that's an important right. And it shows that, with drug pricing, it's one of the areas where we can really work in a bipartisan way, because there is significant consensus. We've got to get drug prices down.

And thanks to the President's leadership, we've already taken major action since the President rolled out his blueprint, brought competition and negotiation for the first time ever to an important part of the Medicare program. We're creating a pathway for importation of drugs to relieve exorbitant price increases of generic drugs and other branded, sole-source drugs here in the United States that are off-patent.

And he's also brought increased competition through generic approvals and historic levels, and ended gaming by branded companies to prevent the entrance of new generic drugs. And more on that coming soon.

And this is just the tip of the iceberg. In the weeks and months ahead, we have got so much more coming, in terms of regulatory action to bring down the price of drugs in this country. And the President is adamant about that. We're going to deliver on that. And it's all coming to a theater near you. And thank you very much, Mr. President, for your leadership here.

The President. Thank you very much.

Secretary Azar. Thank you.

The President. Thank you very much. It's been long in the making.

[*At this point, the President signed the bills.*]

Okay. That's a big thing.

The President's Travel to Erie, PA/Hurricane Michael

Q. Mr. President, given the gravity of the storm, do you think it's appropriate to go on a campaign trip tonight, sir?

The President. Well, I hear they have thousands of people lined up, and so we are in a little bit of a quagmire. I don't want to disappoint people. They've gotten there—some people were saying that they got there last night. I believe it starts at about 7 o'clock—going to Pennsylvania. So we'll probably go. Because what are you going to do? Tell thousands of people that have been waiting there all night that we're not coming? That's not fair either.

So it's a very—but we have our—it's a very difficult situation, actually. We have our people ready. We are really ready in Florida, and frankly, Georgia, Alabama, North Carolina, South Carolina. We're very ready. And I think it'll be just fine.

But I can't tell thousands of people that have been waiting—some of whom got there literally last night, in order to be and get into an arena at 7 o'clock. It's hard to tell them: "By the way, you've been waiting all day. Go home." That's not nice, either.

I'm going to give some pens out. Come on over here, Carter. [*Laughter*] Lamar, thank you very much. And we have a few—come on over here, Mr. Secretary. Who's back here? He deserves it, huh?

Everybody all set over here? Okay, we'll do that. Thank you all very much. Appreciate it. Thank you.

Disappearance of Saudi Journalist Jamal Khashoggi

Q. Mr. President, did you speak to the Saudi Crown Prince, sir? Or only staff?

The President. We're going to have a comment on that very soon. And we are very disappointed to see what's going on. We don't like it. We don't like it at all. And we're going to get to the bottom of it. Thank you very much. Thank you, folks.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:49 p.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Secretary Kirstjen M. Nielsen of Homeland Security; and Federal Emergency Management Agency Administrator W. Brock Long. A reporter referred to Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman bin Abd al-Aziz Al Saud of Saudi Arabia. S. 2553 and S. 2554, approved October 10, were assigned Public Law Nos. 115–262 and 115–263, respectively.

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